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Kosova Libraries: History and Development

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Abstract:

This article presents facts, evidences and arguments related to the history and development of Kosova libraries. It gives evidence-based information about the consequences of Serbian coercive measures on Kosova libraries, in general, and on the National and University Library, in particular, during the last decade of the 20th century. The article is based on different sources, such as reports, documents, photographs, etc. However, those sources represent only a bit of evidences of cultural apartheid exercised on Kosova's cultural and educational institutions, in this case on libraries, by the Serbian regime throughout the 1990s. Facts show that 175 libraries with a total collection of 1,665,496 copies/items were burnt down by Serbian army and paramilitary forces during the years of 1998/1999.

Although having experienced great losses, Kosova libraries after the period of 1999 started to normally function by enriching, preserving, and processing all their inherited collections, including those that represent the languages of minorities living in Kosova. At the end of the article, a brief summary of the activities of the National and University Library of Kosova during the past decade is presented in order to show its future orientations to develop and advance.

Introduction

This article, which was written as a reaction against the article of Serbian authors Simocic and Vukadinovic presented in the 75th IFLA Congress in Milano, Italy in 2009, aims to provide facts and information related to Kosova library history and development. Unfortunately, the Serbian authors in their article followed the old pattern of Serbian mentality to alienate the history and culture of the other, in our case, the cultural heritage of Kosova, claiming to alienate historical facts, such as cultural objects, including library institutions, especially the institution of the National and University Library of Kosova. Those are not, however, the first claims of this sort against the cultural heritage of Kosova. It is widely known that it was the Serbian regime of Milosevic with his machinery, which destroyed and burnt down not only Kosova's cultural objects during the 1998/1999 war, but also displaced violently more than 1 million Albanians to neighboring countries, with the sole aim of an ethnic cleansing of the territory. The arm of this regime to destroy the cultural heritage of other people, including libraries, was present throughout Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and finally Kosova (For more information, see Riedlmayer, 2007). Instead of apologizing to Albanian people, first for the genocide to the people of Kosova, and then for destroying libraries and other cultural heritage, the Serbian side continues with their attempts to hide their crimes even after more than ten years of the end of the war through launching accusation and untruths and misleading facts in the public.

Long time ago, the whole Adriatic coast was inhabited by the Albanian ancestors, the Illyrians. On the other hand, it is a fact that Slavs migrated in the Balkans between the 7th and 8th century, and they became Christians only after the 10th century. Therefore, we would like to give some modest examples of alienating Kosova's cultural heritage and history by the Serbian side. A typical example of such alienation is the church of the Holy Virgin of Ljevisa of the 14th century in the south city of Kosova, Prizren, which was built on the foundation of the Illyrian basilica of the 6th century (Hoddinott, 1963). This church was mentioned in the article by Simocic and Vukadinovic (2009, p. 11). A number of other churches were also built following the same pattern to hide and lose the Illyrian-Albanian heritage and connections. Another recent and worrying example is the stealing of artifacts from the Museum of Kosova and other museums during the 1998/1999 war. All those artifacts were sent to Belgrade for a so called "exhibition", exactly to be shown on the day when NATO bombardment of Serbian military targets started on March 24th, 1999 (Riedlmayer, 2000). Those artifacts have never been returned to this date in their home country, Kosova.

There are endless arguments proving the Illyrian-Albanian presence in the Balkan Peninsula; however our focus in this article is to provide some accounts of the history and development of Kosova libraries, including a brief overview of Kosova in the recent years.

Kosova a brief overview

The Republic of Kosova, a small country, but very characteristic with its diverse political, geographical, historical, social and cultural features, holds a special place in the Balkan and European overall developments. On February 17, 2008, it declared its independence, becoming the newest state in the world with clear mission and vision to integrate in the European Union and wider in the world of peaceful states. Since then, it has been recognized by 69 states (as of 19 May 2010).

Geographically, Kosova stretches over a territory of 10.908 km^2 and has a continental climate. It is a landlocked country bordering Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. It is rich with natural resources, including lignite coal (fifth largest reserves in the world), lead, zinc, nickel, silver, chrome, bauxite, magnesium, etc., (Independent Commission for Mines and Minerals, 2005). It is also rich in surface water, with eight main rivers and four main lakes. The highest mountain peak in Kosova is that of Gjeravica in South-West of Kosova with an altitude of 2.656 meters (Enti i Statistikës së Kosovës, 2008). The capital of Kosova is Prishtina.

According to Kosova's Agency for Statistics (Enti i Statistikave të Kosovës), Kosova has an estimated population of 2,180,686 inhabitants. It has a birthrate of 16%, and a mortality rate of 3.2%. The ethnic composition of population is 92% Albanian, 5.3% Serbian and 2.7% other ethnic groups. Kosova is well known for its young population where 33% are between the age of 0-14, 61% are 15-64 years, and only 6% are above the age of 65 (Enti i Statistikave të Kosovës, n.d.).

Figure 1: Map of Kosova[1]

The new social order in the Republic of Kosova enabled Kosovars for the first time in their history, with the help of the international community, to do themselves their developmental, educational, cultural and other policies. In this regard, the Government of Kosova paid an important attention to the education system by making it the highest priority of the country. Simultaneously, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology declared Kosova as "The State of Knowledge", convinced that a knowledge society will create skilled professionals able to be self-employed and create employment opportunities for the others, thus reducing the existing unemployment that varies between 30-

[1] Source: http://www.courts.state.nh.us/supreme/newsletter/winter_08/kosovo.htm

40%. According to Kosova's Agency for Statistics (2004), illiteracy is around 8% among adults, with a considerable difference between rural and urban as well as gender population. Furthermore, this Agency states that "... illiteracy among the younger generation is disappearing". This phenomenon is expected to completely disappear with the new measures taken by Kosova Ministry of Education to make pre-primary, primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary education mandatory in Kosova.

Of course, these phenomena, i.e. illiteracy and unemployment, have their roots in the past history of occupied Kosova. It is important to note here that Kosovars were allowed their superior education (University level) only after 1970 with the opening of the University of Prishtina. The opening of this University was accompanied with many political pressures from the ex-Yugoslav regime; however, it survived throughout different times. Although it seemed that an economic stability was achieved during the 1970s and 1980s, everything collapsed in 1989 when Milosevic regime revoked the constitution of Kosova and expelled the whole Albanian workers from their workplaces. The same fate followed Albanian library community who, together with their colleagues in other institutions of the public sector, remained for ten consecutive years out of their work places, i.e. throughout 1990 to1999.

Historic Development of Kosova Libraries

Different sources show that the history of libraries in Kosova dates back as early as 15th century. Thus, the Library of "Suzi Qelebiu (1513) in the city of Prizren is considered to be among the first libraries in Kosova. The function of the then-libraries in Kosova was mainly related to fulfill the mission of religious communities. That tradition has continued to the mid 20th century, when the first institutionalized public libraries appeared.

The year of 1944 marks the establishment of the first public library institution of Kosova in Prizren, i.e. the establishment of the National and University Library of Kosova. Thus, the development of Kosova libraries has as their reference point the development and the history of this institution, which passed through different difficult phases and name changing. The Library was known as The Regional Library of the Autonomous Province of Kosova and Metochia (1944-1952), The Library Center of the Autonomous Province of Kosova and Metochia (1956-1961), The Provincial People's Library (1961-1970), People's and University Library of Kosova (1970-1990), The People's and University Library of Kosova and Metochia (1990-1999), and finally The National and University Library of Kosova since 1999. As it can be seen, the many changes of the name of this institution represent different historical phases and political instability of the country.

Photo 1: The building of the National and University Library of Kosova

The National and University Library of Kosova is the premier library institution in the country and the center of library information on the national level. The building in the photo above was inaugurated in the year of 1981. The mission of the National and University Library of Kosova is similar to the mission of national libraries elsewhere in the world.

The regional libraries in Kosova are of the second level regarding their importance from the library perspective. Those libraries function in the main centers of Kosova, such as: Prishtina, Prizren, Peja, Mitrovica, Gjakova, Gjilan, Ferizaj and Leposaviq. The third level of public libraries is considered municipal libraries located at each municipality of the country. Academic, special and other types of libraries have a special place in the library community as well.

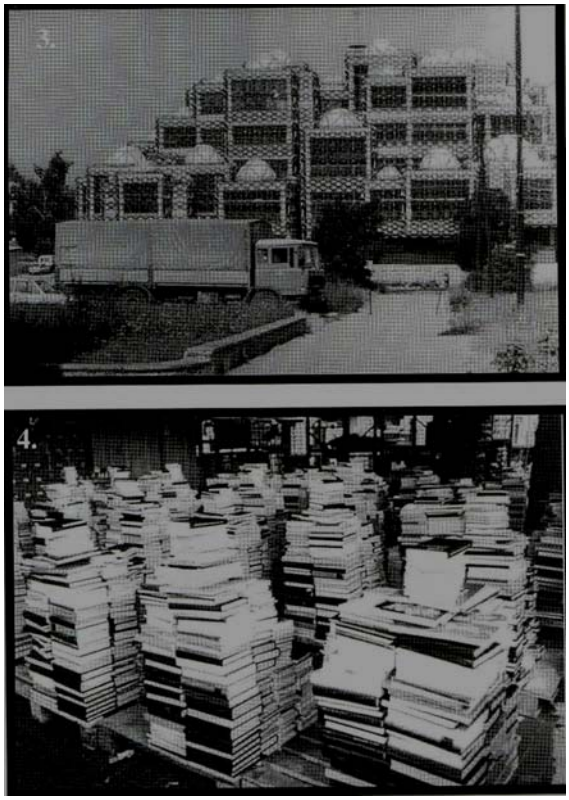
When the constitution of Kosova was revoked in 1989, libraries, similarly with other institution of the public sector in the country, were discriminated by the then Serbian regime. The period of 1998/1999 marks the period of occupation and inquisition, that is a period of destroying, looting and burning down library collections as well as many public and private libraries in Kosova.

Throughout the years of 1990 to 1999, the Serbian regime forced coercive measures over the National and University Library of Kosova denying the rights of Albanian population to be served. Those coercive measures were installed with a decision of the Parliament of Serbia, which was published in the Official Gazette no. 40/90, 53/90 and 54/90. The first step of those measures was to systematically expel Albanian and non-Serb library workers. During that period, 91 workers were expelled from the Library and were replaced by Serbian workers. Besides the fact that the Library served as a shelter for the

refugees of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina throughout the 90s, it was also used as a military base of the Serbian army between the 5/04/1999 to 14/06/1999 during NATO bombardment of Serbian targets. This unlawful and unprecedented use of a cultural institution can be evidenced through the document with the number No. 1351 of the Serbian Army Headquarter of the date 14/06/1999, a document that is being stored in the archive of the National and University Library of Kosova. However, it was not the Library as the only institution to be used for such purposes, but there were other cultural and religious institutions violated by the Serbian army, such as "the Church of St. Anthony in Prishtina, and St. Anthony's Catholic Church and the adjacent Franciscan convent in Gjakova" (Riedlmayer, 2001, p. 9), then the Archive of Kosova, the Institute of History (Riedlmayer, 1999-2000). Those acts were a violation of the international laws of war.

The National and University Library of Kosova, under the coercive measures of the Serbian administration between 1990-1999, acquired 22,000 books, all of them in Serbian language and none in Albanian. In the same period, 125,981 library copies/items in Albanian language were destroyed by the Serbian administration and sent to a paper factory in the city of Lipjan (BKUK, raporti nr. 11, 2006). This Library institution experienced a cleansing of Albanian valuable titles, including the most prominent Albanian traditional authors. Along with those damages, the Republic of Serbia, more exactly the Ministry of Culture with the document no 630-02-32/99-34 of the date 8 February 1999, violated once again the name of this institution by changing it to The National and University Library "Ivo Andric" (Document of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia, no. 630-02-32/99-34, 1999).

Photo 2: Truck waiting and books packed ready to be loaded and removed.



The above photo in the block picture (Photo 2) shows a truck waiting to be loaded in front of the National and University Library of Kosova. The below photo shows heaps of books waiting to be loaded on the truck to be sent to the Paper Factory in Lipjan for paper processing (Photo by Ilaz Bylykbashi, 1996).

In the country level, there were 65 public libraries burnt down with an overall collection of 968,233 copies/items during the 1998/99 war (See also Riedlmayer, 2007, pp. 122-126). In addition, 14 special libraries with 145,105 copies, 86 primary school

libraries 325,415 copies and, 10 secondary school libraries with 226,743 copies were completely burnt down. Thus, in Kosova in general, there were 175 libraries with a total collection of 1,665,496 copies burnt down by Serbian military and paramilitary forces (Gjenocidi serb ndaj librit shqip në Kosovë 1998/1999, 2000). Statistics above do not include private libraries, the majority of which were completely destroyed. During that period, Serbian forces killed 6 librarians. Even those libraries that were not burnt down, their collections and infrastructure were gravely damaged to that extent that they could not function for a while after the end of the war. For the destruction, burning, damages and the state of Kosova libraries after the war period of 1998/1999, the IFLA/FAIFE report by Carsten Frederiksen and Frode Bakken (2000) speaks out by itself

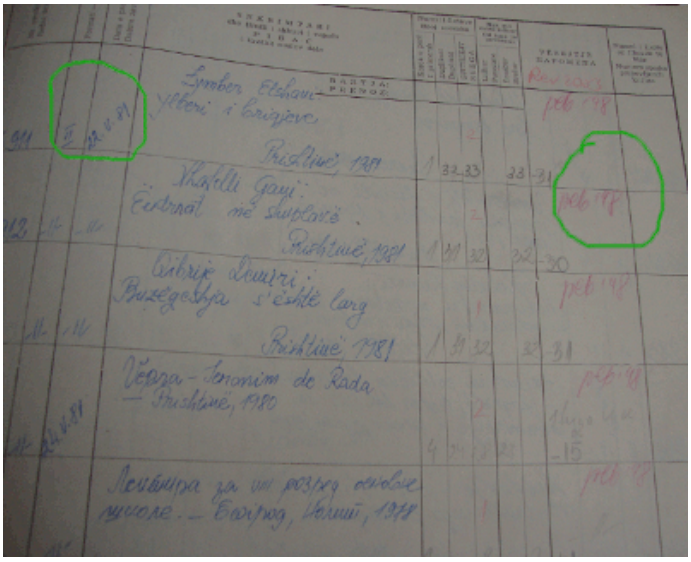


Photo 3: Images from the inventory book.

This inventory book evidences the removal and destruction of many valuable Albanian books of the National and University Library of Kosova by Serbian coercive measures. The green circle on the left corner shows the date of book arrival/registration, i.e. 22.V.81; the green circle on the right shows the date of intervention, that is *Feb '98* and close to it the number of removed copies in grey color.

Photo 4 School and School Library burnt down by Serbian forces in the region of Klina in 1998/99.

Libraries and books in Kosova passed through different developmental and interruption periods. Facts and evidences clearly show the phases of normal development of library activities, as well as the phases of discrimination by the occupying Serbian regime throughout the 1990s. However, the new developments at the National and University Library of Kosova as well as at other libraries throughout Kosova are focused toward offering better services and free access to information resources through the application of new communication and information

technologies. Thus, trying to overcome the consequences of the past and catching the lost years of the last decade of the past century.

The Collections of the National and University Library of Kosova

The collections of the National and University Library of Kosova number around two million items, including books, journals, newspapers, maps, scores, photo-documents, etc. The Library's collection reflects the ethnic composition of the country as well as holds a number of items in world languages. Recently, the Library has quite focused in providing its membership with access to well-known electronic resources.

The statistics further below show only the collection of the Library processed in its Integrated Library System (ILS), and made available through its OPAC. Therefore, those statistics do not represent the overall Library collection. However, they represent a substantial sample of the total holdings of the Library and its composition in terms of language representation. Through the statistics of the National and University Library of Kosova in Table 1, and those retrieved from the libraries in Serbia in Tables 2 and 3, we aim to stop once and forever all those claims and unscrupulous speculations that "There is no European nation nowadays whose libraries ... are more endangered than the collections of Serbian books in Kosovo ..." (Simončić & Vukadinović, 2009, p. 4). We also aim to test false the claims of the mentioned authors that library collections in Serbian language were sent to the National Library of Serbia in order to protect them from destruction (Simončić & Vukadinović f. 11). Rather than protecting, the Serbian state had organized everything to steal the cultural and historical heritage of the people of Kosova, in the same manner as it had stolen the artifacts of the Museum of Kosova and other museums, libraries and archives, which we have mentioned above in the introductory part. Regardless of language or other features, those collections belong to Kosova and not to Serbia. Therefore, the following statistics prove worldly the presence, preservation and processing of the collections in Serbian language and other languages in the premier Library institution of Kosova. And that all of its collection is treated equally without any language, ethnic or historical discrimination; thus, falsifying the claims of the Serbian authors, Simocic and Vukadinovic and other Serbian propaganda.

Since 2005 when the Library first started to do electronic processing of its printed collection through the newly acquired ILS, Aleph 500, 40,220 titles totaling 101,367 items have been entered into the system. Statistics below were retrieved through the Library's OPAC[2] on April 19, 2010. Table 1 represents language composition of those 40,220 titles. To retrieve those statistics, the CCL (Command Control Language) technique for more accuracy was used. The following searching methodology was used: WLN = [for] Word from Language to be followed by the respective MARC21 language

[2] The OPAC of the National and University Library of Kosova, URL: www.biblioteka-ks.org/Katalogu.php

code, i.e. ALB, SCC, etc. Search commands entered in the CCL search box: WLN = (ALB), then WLN = (SCC), WLN = (ENG), and so on..

Table 1: Titles according to language composition

No.	Language Code	No. of Titles	No. of titles in %
1.	Alb (Albanian)	21,160	52.6 %
2.	Scc (Serbian)	4,924	12.2 %
3.	Eng (English)	7,958	19.7 %
4.	Fre (French)	2,719	6.7 %
5.	Slv (Slovenian)	715	1.7 %
6.	Mac (Macedonian)	171	0.4 %
7.	Bos (Bosnian)	241	0.6 %
8.	Rus (Russian)	195	0.5 %
9.	Others	2,137	5.6 %
	Total	**40,220**	**100%**

Table 1 above shows that the materials in Serbian language consist more than 12% of the titles entered into the Library's ILS. In total, the collections in Slavic languages (Serbian, Slovenian, Macedonian, Bosnian, and Russian) consist more than 15% of the electronically processed Library's holdings. Refreshing our memory that 5-7% of Kosova's population is of Slavic origin, the collection representation for this community meets any national and international standards and conventions for respecting human rights of minority groups. Furthermore, it proves that the National and University Library of Kosova follows unbiased and rightful policies towards its own holdings. As a matter of fact, how one can talk about destruction of certain type of collections, when those are equally preserved and processed by the library institutions of the country.

Statistics in the Table 2 and 3 below were retrieved from the COBISS system of the National Library of Serbia[3] and the Union Bibliographic/Catalog Database[4] of Serbia, with 117 libraries in its network. Statistics were retrieved on May 22, 2010. Tables 2 and 3 were created purposefully to compare the percentage (%) of the collections in Albanian language processed by Serbian libraries in Serbia with the Albanian population living in that country. The searching methodology used was Advanced Search, through use of List of Prefixes and Suffixes, which is an equivalent CCL search technique used in Aleph above. Searching was done using the phrases: LA= "SCC" and then LA= "ALB" in the Advance Mode of the COBISS system as per instructions on the system's online help.

Table 2: Titles according to language composition in the National Library of Serbia

[3] OPAC of the National Library of Serbia, select National Library of Serbia after entering the following URL: http://www.vbs.rs/scripts/cobiss?ukaz=GETID&lani=en

[4] The Union Bibliographic/Catalog of Serbia, select the union bibliographic/catalogue database after you enter the following URL: http://www.vbs.rs/scripts/cobiss?ukaz=GETID&lani=en

Library name:	National Library of Serbia with a total of 772.333 records		
No.	**Language Code**	**No. of Titles**	**Titles in %**
1.	Scc (Serbian)	540989	70.05%
2.	Alb (Albanian)	2042	0.26%

Table 3: Titles according to language composition in the Union Bibliographic/Catalog Database of Serbia

Library name:	Union Catalog of Serbia with a total of 2.151.626 records		
No.	**Language Code**	**No. of Titles**	**Titles in %**
1.	Scc (Serbian)	1216314	56.53%
2.	Alb (Albanian)	7349	0.34%

The ethnic Albanian population living in Serbia numbers 63,835 inhabitants or 0.85% of the overall population in Serbia (Republika Srbija, Republički zavod za statistiku, 2003). Statistics above clearly show that collection in Albanian language are underrepresented (0.26% and 0.34%, respectively) in both the National Library of Serbia and in the Union Catalog with its 117 libraries in the network. Therefore, the % of Albanian processed collection is not in close proportion with the Albanian population living in Serbia. As statistics above show, library institutions in Serbia follow the same political and ethnic discrimination that is being done to the Albanian ethnicity by Serbian government throughout history. Therefore, Albanian population living in Serbia is denied from their basic rights for information. The world library community should pay some attention to these discriminatory facts through its mechanisms and committees.

The Developments in the National and University Library of Kosova during the Past Decade

The sufferings of the National and University Library of Kosova, with all those changes of its name, imposition of coercive measures in 1990-1999, and cleansing of its collection, ended in 1999 when the people of Kosova won their long-sought freedom. Since then, this Library institution has entered a new phase of success and development, with a clear mission to collect, organize, serve and preserve the documented intellectual heritage of the territory of Kosova.

During the past decade, the Library has established several small libraries within its building in order to offer better services to specialized patrons, such as: The American Corner Library, The Contemporary Art Library, NATO Library, Music Library, European Library, Personal libraries of Fehmi Agani and Krist Maloki, and the Documentary Center "Kosova Memory". These small libraries with their valuable collections are gifts from local and international institutions, individuals and outstanding personalities. Their diverse collections in terms of language offer interesting information for specialists of certain fields of knowledge.

The National and University Library of Kosova is co-founder of two main library events. One of the events is "The Library Week in Kosova" jointly established by the Library and the U.S. Embassy in Kosova in 2003 with the sole purpose of bringing together local and international librarians and information professionals to Kosova. This event takes place every year in the month of April. The other event is "The National Conference of Librarianship" jointly established between the National and University Library of Kosova and the National Library of Albania in 2006. This event has a scientific character and aims at advancing the library theory and practice in both countries. The National Conference of Librarianship rotates one year in Kosova and one year in Albania and takes place every year in the third week of November.

Since 2004, the Library has published its journal "Biblioletra". This journal brings to the interested reader complete information on library development within the National and University Library as well as other libraries and library trends in Kosova. "Biblioletra" has become a common place where library and information professionals and experts share their thoughts, ideas, and best practices with other colleagues in Kosova and elsewhere. In this context, it is important to note that the Library has published more than 60 titles of books and other formats in the field of library and information science, including translation of world LIS professional literature[5].

In 2004, the Library has also acquired one of the leading Integrated Library System, Aleph 500, a product of ExLibris Company, for the automation of its overall library services. Nowadays, most of Library's services for its patrons and staff are based on Aleph platform.

The Library has also achieved to restore and create new cooperation links with world library institutions and organizations. Besides being one of the founding members of the Union of Balkan Libraries in 2009 in Edirne, Turkey, the Library is member of many international organizations. The library is member of ISBN and ISMN agencies, then of eIFL.net, etc. In addition, the Library has entered into written agreements with several library institutions throughout the world, including cooperation with the Library of Congress, different libraries in France, Switzerland, Poland, Rumania, Germany, Turkey, England, Croatia, Macedonia and other Balkan libraries. Since August 2009, the Library is a regular member of the Conference of Directors of National Libraries.

[5] See the publications of the Library on the web, URL: http://www.biblioteka-ks.org/Veprimtaria_botuese.php

Conclusion

Kosova's public libraries had an irregular development throughout their history, especially after the World War II. This phenomenon was even more present in the 1990s with the imposition of coercive measures throughout Kosova libraries and other public sectors of the country. Besides biased practices towards collection development throughout the 1990s, hundreds of libraries were completely burnt down in the 1998/1999 war. Moreover, those that remained had an almost out-of-function infrastructure and damaged collection.

Throughout the article, we have presented facts and information based on local and international sources related to the library development in Kosova. The National and University Library has been emphasized more here due to the fact that it serves as a reference point for the history of not only other libraries, but of the history of the people of Kosova itself. After the freedom of the country in 1999, the National and University Library, and other public libraries of Kosova as well, have been focused towards fulfilling their mission by respecting all ethnic minorities as stated in the Constitution of the new state. In this context, several statistics have been drawn together to show that Library's collections, regardless of language and other parameters, are processed, organized and preserved equally. The attention has been drawn to Serbian language materials in order to stop once and forever all those voices that claim the "endangered" state of such collections in Kosova libraries.

In the end, we would like to emphasize that the National and University Library of Kosova, as the premier library of the country, is always ready for constructive cooperation of any nature. However, it will never hesitate to react and respond to any untruths launched against it or other libraries in Kosova. Lastly, the Library and the whole library community of Kosova hopes to overcome political and technical obstacles in fully joining the community of world libraries, that is becoming full member of IFLA.

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